

Topic: II. The Voters

What the students do: Take the roles of hypothetical candidates and their staff members and create a strategy to attract young voters. Students will use recent research findings to guide their work.

CA History-Social Science Standards: 12.2.4, 12.6.6

CMS Promising Approaches: 1, 2, 6 and potentially 3

Thanks to: [Constitutional Rights Foundation](#)

Get the Youth Vote!

Overview

In this two-day session, students explore reasons why the voting rate for young people (18-29) is lower than for other age groups, and they take the roles of a special “youth vote team” to help a hypothetical candidate capture the youth vote.

First, students brainstorm answers to the question, “Why don’t young people vote?” Next, students work in small groups to take a look at recent research on youth voting and create a strategy directed at young voters.

During Day Two, students present their strategies and participate in a debriefing discussion.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Generate possible reasons for a low voting rate among 18-29 year olds.
- Explore research and data about voting rates.
- Develop strategies for a hypothetical candidate to motivate young voters.

Materials/Preparation

Handout 1: “Go Vote for Gomez!” —1 per student

Handouts 2–5: One of the handouts per ¼ of the class. (e.g., for 24 students, run off 6 copies of each handout)

Possible Resource People: It would be great to have an elected official or someone who is running for office come to hear and comment on the students’ ideas.

Day One Procedure

I. Focus Activity: Why Don’t Young People Vote?

Tell students that today they will become staff members working on the campaign of Alex Gomez, a candidate running for state senator.

Distribute **Handout 1: Go Vote for Gomez** and ask students to take a look at the first section titled “The Voters.” Read the section together, and then explain that there are over 42 million young adults between the ages of 18-29 who are eligible to vote in our country, but that in the 2006 national elections, less than 25 percent of these people voted. Over the last couple of decades, the youth vote has declined, but recently, new efforts are being made to reach this important group.

The (hypothetical) campaign manager has learned that if Gomez can capture the youth vote, it could be a landslide. Today, students will become a special team of the candidate’s staff focusing on getting the youth vote. Explain that to get started, they need to think about the problem so that they can come up with solutions. Ask the class to brainstorm:

Why do you think so many young people do not vote?

Make a list of the students’ responses on the board. Tell students that this list should be helpful to them, as the candidate’s special youth vote team, as they come up with new ways to reach young voters.

II. Small-Group Activity: Get the Youth Vote!

Explain that a lot is being done nationally to get young people engaged in voting. Last year, over \$40 million was invested in trying to understand what motivates young voters and what turns them off to the political process.

Refer students to the section in Handout 1 titled “Facts About Youth Voters” and go over the key points with the class.

Tell students that their next task as the youth vote team is to create special campaign strategies directed at your community’s young voters. Divide the class into groups of 2-4 students.

Distribute the “Special Assignment” sheets (Handouts 2 through 5) to each group. Tell them that each group will create a strategy and message directed at young voters. Each group will present its ideas during the next session.

Let the students know how much time they will have to prepare today and at the beginning of the next session.

Day Two Procedure

I. Final Preparations

Remind students how much time they have to prepare for their presentations and that each person from their group should have some role in presenting their group’s ideas.

II. Presentations of Youth Vote Special Assignments

Each group should present its strategy. After the groups have presented, ask the whole class:

- What strategies do you think would work well with younger voters? Why?
- How would you convince a candidate that the youth vote is important?

- What would you tell real candidates to do if they want to get the youth vote?
- Do you think you would ever be interested in working on a real campaign to help reach young voters? Why or why not?

III. Optional Activities: Putting Our Ideas to the Test

Have your students put their ideas in action by:

- Contacting the candidate of their choice and sharing ideas about reaching young voters. Students could bring “evidence” to class to show how he/she went about contacting the candidate’s staff, the response, etc.
- Implementing their ideas during a school-based student government election.
- Implementing their ideas to increase student participation in the MyVote California Student Mock Elections, sponsored by the Secretary of State and Superintendent of Public Instruction: <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/studentmockelection.htm>

Go Vote for Gomez!

The Campaign Team

Imagine that you are a member of a campaign team. Your candidate, Alex Gomez, is running for state senate. Today your team will focus on an important group of the voting population.

Before your team gets started today, read the background information below about voters.

Voters

As you know, the U.S. Constitution ensures that citizens who are at least 18 years old have the right to vote. In the 1780s, just after the American Revolution, only about 6 percent of the population was allowed to vote, mostly white males who owned a certain amount of property. Over the years, through legislation and constitutional amendments, more groups won the right to vote:

- African American males in 1870 (15th Amendment)
- Women in 1920 (19th Amendment)
- People who are 18 years of age or older in 1971 (26th Amendment)

Voting is central to our democracy. Through voting, “we the people” have a voice about who our leaders are, what are laws are, and the policies that impact our daily lives. If we don’t vote, then we are leaving the power in the hands of leaders who were elected by “we *a few* of the people”!

But many Americans do not take advantage of this important right. The highest voting rates occur during the years of a Presidential election. In the 2004 presidential election, 64 percent of voting-age citizens voted. That means that over one-third of the people who could vote did not.

Local elections tend to draw far fewer voters to the polls. For example, in the 2005 mayoral election in Los Angeles, only 36 percent of the registered voters cast ballots, and in the 2003 city election, only about 10 percent of registered voters voted.

Because voting is so essential to our system of governance, voting rates are tracked by national and local governments, as well as researchers. Millions of dollars are spent each year to study how many people voted in elections. Researchers look at who voted and who did not vote by age groups, ethnicity, and many other factors. In this way, we learn more about why people vote — and why people do not vote.

Get the Youth Vote!

You are a member of a campaign team trying to get Alex Gomez elected for state senator. Gomez is 37 years old, and if elected, would be the youngest senator ever to serve in your state. Alex grew up in your community, attending public schools and helping to run a small family-owned restaurant. Alex worked hard to attend college, graduated with honors, and went on to law school. After getting a law degree, Alex worked as a prosecutor for the District Attorney. Active in the city’s Chamber of Commerce, Alex started a program to help middle class citizens open their own small businesses. This program has become a model throughout the state. In addition to an interest in improving the economy through supporting small business, Gomez is committed to protecting the state’s natural resources and supporting the state’s public schools.

If your candidate can win the “youth vote,” it is predicted that the election will be a landslide in your favor! Your state has a large population of people between the ages of 18 and 24. No one else running for office has bothered to try to reach this important group of voters, so your candidate has decided to put some time, money, and energy into reaching young voters. You are a member of the candidate’s special Youth Vote Team, and your job is to help Alex capture the youth vote.

Facts about Youth Voters

The candidate’s analysts have put together some facts from recent research to help you. (The candidate is imaginary, but this research is real.)

- Candidates have struggled trying to reach young voters for many years. The voting age in this country used to be 21. But in 1971 the 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, lowering the voting age to 18. In 1972, almost half of the 18-24 year olds who were eligible to vote did. However, since that time, the number of young people who vote has declined. In fact, less than 25 percent who were eligible to vote participated in national elections in 2006.
- Phone banks are a common campaign strategy. Many candidates have volunteers and staff call registered voters. The campaign staff creates a script for the volunteers to use so that the voters all get the same message about the candidate and his/her stand on issues. Usually, the script is very short and to the point, because people over the age of 30 tend to like it that way. The call often ends with something like, “We hope to get your vote on Tuesday!”
- “Robocalling” is another phone call strategy that uses automated calling and a recorded message. Research shows that this is not effective with 18-29 year olds.
- The direct mail strategy is also very common. Candidates send out flyers and brochures to registered voters through the mail. Data shows that this strategy does not work with young voters.
- Young voters (ages 18 to 29) are more racially and ethnically diverse than older voters, according to the exit polls. (Kirby & Marcelo, 2006)
- Young voters were relatively late to make up their minds. They were the most likely age group to make their voting decision on Election Day. (Kirby & Marcelo, 2006)
- Quality counts. Research shows that the most effective method of generating a new voter is an in-person door knock by a peer. The next greatest impact was seen by phone banks with longer, chattier phone scripts or volunteers making the calls. (Darrow, 2003)
- Begin with the basics. Young people need nuts-and-bolts information about how to vote. And efforts that make voting more convenient are quite effective. (Darrow, 2003)
- The use of e-mail, text messaging, online social networking sites, and other new technologies gives us easy ways to reach young voters where they are—online or on their cell phones. (Darrow, 2003)

- Use technologies that young people use like text messaging and the Internet, but only in ways that allow them to choose to participate in the dialogue. (Kirby & Marcelo1, 2006)

Sources:

Young Voters in the 2006 Elections. Emily Hoban Kirby and Karlo Barrios Marcelo. CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; www.civicyouth.org), 2006.

Young Voter Mobilization Tactics: A Compilation of the Most Recent Research on Traditional and Innovative Voter Turnout Techniques. Carolyn Darrow. Tides Center; YouthVote Coalition, a project of Tides Center, 2003

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; <http://www.civicyouth.org>)

Youth Vote — Special Assignment: Phone bank

Your task is to create a new strategy directed at young voters. Use the information provided by the analysts (Handout 1) and your own knowledge about young people to come up with a strategy that will work.

Your group will focus on creating a strategy for **phone calls**. Assume calls will be made to registered voters between the ages of 18-24.

1. Who should make the calls?
2. When should the calls be made?
 - A. Time of day?
 - B. When during the election?
3. Create the script for the caller to use to encourage the person to vote for your candidate.
4. Prepare to present your strategy to the rest of the campaign staff. Each person should have some role in the presentation. Be sure to:
 - A. Tell what your special assignment was.
 - B. Present your answers to all of the questions.
 - C. Explain your decisions and why you think your strategy will work.

Youth Vote — Special Assignment: Face-To-Face Contact

Your task is to create a new strategy directed at young voters. Use the information provided by the analysts (Handout 1) and your own knowledge about young people to come up with a strategy that will work.

Your group will focus on creating a strategy for **face-to-face contact** with people between the ages of 18-24.

1. What type of face-to-face contact should we go for? (door-knocking, stopping people passing by, etc.)
2. What type of volunteers should we recruit for this?
3. Where should the volunteers work?
4. Create the script for the volunteers to use to encourage the person to vote for your candidate.
5. Prepare to present your strategy to the rest of the campaign staff. Each person should have some role in the presentation. Be sure to:
 - A. Tell what your special assignment was.
 - B. Present your answers to all of the questions.
 - C. Explain your decisions and why you think your strategy will work.

Youth Vote — Special Assignment: Cell Phone Technology

Your task is to create a new strategy directed at young voters. Use the information provided by the analysts (Handout 1) and your own knowledge about young people to come up with a strategy that will work.

Your group will focus on creating a strategy for using **cell phone technology** with people between the ages of 18-24.

1. What type of cell phone technology should we use? (calls, text messaging, etc.)

2. When should the messages/calls be sent?
 - A. Time of day?

 - B. When during the election?

3. Create the script for the volunteers to use to encourage the person to vote for your candidate.

4. Prepare to present your strategy to the rest of the campaign staff. Each person should have some role in the presentation. Be sure to:
 - A. Tell what your special assignment was.
 - B. Present your answers to all of the questions.
 - C. Explain your decisions and why you think your strategy will work.

Youth Vote — Special Assignment: Computer Technology

Your task is to create a new strategy directed at young voters. Use the information provided by the analysts (Handout 1) and your own knowledge about young people to come up with a strategy that will work.

Your group will focus on creating a strategy for using **computer technology** with people between the ages of 18-24.

1. What type of computer technology should we use? (e-mail, chat, web site, etc.)
2. How will we hold the person's interest?
3. Create a sample of what you would use. Show what it would say and describe how it would work.
4. Prepare to present your strategy to the rest of the campaign staff. Each person should have some role in the presentation. Be sure to:
 - A. Tell what your special assignment was.
 - B. Present your answers to all of the questions.
 - C. Explain your decisions and why you think your strategy will work.